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Dedication to Dr. Dwight Bensend

by Dr. George Thomson

To write about Dwight Bensend is not an easy thing for me to do. A letter of thanks to him for all of his kindnesses through the last 30-odd years—yes; a memorial statement—yes; an analysis of his manner of living—yes; but to select those few hundred words that explain to young people how he came to be so much revered and how those facets of his life that have come to be so admired might be copied, I find almost beyond me.

He was born on March 3, 1913 in Turtle Lake, Wisconsin, the last of seven children. He was so far the last, in fact, that he always thought of his oldest brother as a father-figure and he was surrounded by nephews that were of an age pattern more nearly resembling cousins. Looking back, this seems to me to explain both his awareness of the problems of the old and his desire to surround himself with the young and to help with the infinitely diverse complications that face them.

While never one to allow the foibles of the young to go uncorrected, he would recall the scrapes

and sophomorisms of one-time students who had matured to plateaus of staid responsibility. "Canoe Shoes of the Kaniksu" is now a prominent international consulting forester who, for reasons of economy, bought two unmatched and too large boots for camp wear. The story of the Alaskan BLM staffer who tried to ride a log down the old Diamond Match flume in 1948 is a great favorite. The time he bluffed, after a wood tech exam, that he knew two people had cheated but that he would not grade them down if they confessed—and six students came in—another often told story. Despite biblical enjoinder to hate sin and love the sinner, this is not an easy directive. I believe Dwight Bensend has resolved the conflict and students instinctively know it.

The Professor in a professional school is continuously in contact with a student body, the majority of whose members are in transit from one career choice to another. It is all very well to recognize vacillations as students search out life-time goals; it is something else to have personally experienced uncertainty in a time

when opportunities were fewer than now and living was harder. Dwight Bensend was a good, small-town athlete and visualizing himself as a basketball coach, he started college in Wisconsin at LaCrosse State Teacher's College to prepare for a life that he saw through the eyes of youth. Widened horizons opened up, but a year of college led to a decision to leave coaching for high school teaching with specialization in mathematics and physics. That career choice gave way to another because of a brother-in-law who was a forester for the State of Minnesota. Therefore the Bensend goal-changes were no different than those that current students undergo and the pattern behind the changes is identical: high school athletics suggest coaching, coaching suggests teaching, teaching leads to broadened alternatives from which are selected familiar avenues made attractive by family suggestion or natural inclination. Scratch any forester and the chances are good that you will find the path to career selection remarkably similar.

The School of Forestry at the University of Minnesota was an obvious choice for a western Wisconsin farm boy and it was from here that he graduated with distinction in 1937. He would have graduated earlier if he had not suffered from the almost universal malady of poverty that afflicted college students all over America during the depression years of the thirties. Being entirely without funds, he dropped out in the Spring of 1935 to work on a U.S. Forest Service inventory crew.

A picture of Dwight and a crew of foresters inventorying the State of Wisconsin by running transect lines east and west across the entire state has stuck in my mind for years, and I've told students about it over and over again in lectures about forest inventory. Despite bad boots, deep snow, continually wet feet and a wage of \$80 per month plus found, Dwight was able to save \$100 a month and return to college in the fall and then graduate in 1937.

In 1940 or earlier (great romances are not necessarily publicly documented), Marguerite Molony, one of the student trainee nurses from the Public Health Department, caught Dwight's eye. The romance developed smoothly except that Marguerite was campused for two weeks for sitting on the porch with



Doc Bensend's "Indian heritage" played a part in his involvement with forestry.

her forester friend with the lights off. In 1941 the couple was married and Public Health nurse-Mrs. Bensend by day became thesis-typist and analysis-of-variance-calculator by night until 1942 when the Ph.D. was finally awarded for the study of thiamin and niacin and their effect on the growth of Jack Pine seedlings.

That the degree awarded was to be in silviculture and that Jack Pine was the subject species comes as a surprise to those Products graduates who feel it necessary to "put-down" Management and to those Management students who make the mistake of thinking that "Doc" doesn't understand silviculture.

How did the shift to products and utilization come about? Chance and blind luck play their same hands over and over through the generations. The War put great demands on the forests in many ways, but none more dramatically than in the field of packaging, for if America was to be the arsenal of democracy then vast amounts of munitions and materials had to be crated and sent around the world to the widespread theaters of war. The U.S. Forest Service Products Laboratory in Madison, Wisconsin was charged with developing packaging techniques and specifications, and its need for scientifically educated foresters, chemists, engineers, et al. was great. From 1942 to 1945 new Doctor Bensend and his bride lived in Madison and there learned the products trade without once drawing on his knowledge of photosynthesis and nutrition of Jack Pine.

When the war ended and forestry schools began to return to strength with the influx of returning veterans in 1945, Utah State University hired Dwight to teach some products courses and to run the forestry camp in Logan. These were perhaps as happy years as a young man could have. Friendships of a lifetime were formed here with such men as Dean Louis Turner and Professor Ted Daniels. The stories of duck and deer hunting in the Tooele and Uinta country were told and retold in later years to students and fellow traveller on long pheasant hunting trips that replaced duck hunting when Dwight came to Iowa.



Picture upon joining the staff in 1947.

The Iowa years started in the Fall of 1947. I was a green graduate student, one of two or three, and was invited to lunch in the Union to meet a candidate for the Products position recently vacated by the much-loved George Hartman who had decided to return to the wood preserving business with Long-Bell in DeRidder, Louisiana. "Prof" Hartman was also a father-figure and it was difficult to imagine anyone replacing him as his interest in students was unparalleled, his every-day morality was the perfect model for Christian living and his understanding of employment in industry and the whole profession was the cornerstone on which all of us expected to get jobs. His departure was considered catastrophic. Who, then, was this unknown products-type that we had never heard of that was to fill a place in the department that had had no staffing changes for nine years? No one else was interviewed in those days that preceded Affirmative Action and democratic decision. Dwight Bensend was to be the new products man if he were willing. Look your best. I remember that day 31 years ago as if it were yesterday and my own pain at Dwight Bensend's retirement is doubled because now the cold winds of eternity blow unbuffered on me—the only one left from those receding times.

Among other things assigned to Professor Bensend (he was brought in at the unprecedented rank of full professor and thus has had no promotions for 31 years—something of a record that can only be altered by offering him six stars as a grateful public did to General Pershing) was the task of being *the* Summer Camp Director to replace the alternating directors that we had utilized before. Dwight has assisted at the Itasca Summer Camp when he was a Graduate Assistant at Minnesota and had, of course, reopened and run Utah's Camp for two years. The 1947 Camp was to be held for the third year in a row at an old CCC camp north of Priest River, Idaho. We had two cooks and seven faculty members, including me as "gopher" for Alan "High Gear" Goodspeed to teach mensuration, and Dwight, who was to handle logging and mill trips for the 120 students. My recollections of the Bensends that summer are relatively few since he didn't start directing Camp until the following year. I do recall that they brought a big bag of pecans from a Missouri relative (and this turns out to be the farm to which Dwight and Mareguerite will retire), their middle daughter, Betty, who slipped through the floor boards of an old bridge

while the family was fishing and got snatched out of the water by her ponytail, and that he brought order to the previously unsolved question of who was to be responsible for staying in Camp on the weekends. Up to that time everyone stayed in Camp because it was considered shirking of duty to leave. It was a simple enough process to assign responsibility to one staff member to stay on duty, but apparently hadn't been done before. This innovation, being a departure from the norm, was considered somewhat revolutionary.

It was the second year in Idaho where Dwight took charge of Camp that I began to see what a formidable bundle of energy I was to spend my career following. During the Winter of 1947-48 the heavy snows had taken down most of the mess hall so the Camp Director (Dwight) and the advance party, Dave Herrick (now Director of the USFS Rocky Mountain Forest Experiment Station), rebuilt the mess hall, replumbed all of the broken toilets by pouring cement around them, cleaned the dead ground squirrels out of the water system and had the place all ready to operate before, thank goodness, I appeared to start teaching cruising to 110 foresters. Outside of having a cook who threatened to quit



"Six Million Dollar Man" at work during summer camp.

in mid-camp and a Finnish lady-nutritionist who was given to skinny-dipping in the students' swimming hole, it was a reasonably uneventful summer. Uneventful, that is, until Dwight began to carve out procedures for Camp duties, packing one's own lunch(although one meat, one cheese, and all the peanut butter, etc. was established at the time of the Carthaginian wars and is not unique to Iowa State no matter what you've heard), compiling of student evaluations and a host of things that I adopted when I started running Camps six years later. Parenthetically, it can be noted that there was but a single Camp from 1947 to 1977 that Dwight Bensend or George Thomson (and often both) didn't attend. It is no wonder that he and I seldom have to ask what the other one thinks about something.

In the next thirty years the directions taken by the Iowa State Forestry Department were continually influenced by the energies, aspirations and good sense of our Products man, Dwight Bensend. The swing from a general forestry curriculum to one where students could specialize in either Management or Products was due to his balanced concept that wood was meant to be used and that foresters should understand how best to use it. His forest biology background made him capable of visualizing careers for foresters where woodlands management and mill production and products sales were all parts of a continuum. His approach to curriculum planning stamped a wider breadth and a more rigorous depth on



Summer camp of 1951.

Iowa State Foresters. His own inherent morality and natural respect for the work ethic further helped our students become sought-after producers and ultimately managers and leaders in both the management and the products areas.



Dr. Bensend helping a student during wood technology class.

While never funded for research in a salaried sense, he stimulated large numbers of undergraduates to consider graduate work in the Products area by encouraging them to take on special problems that gave each a taste for scientific investigation. His graduate students were closely guided and by his personal involvement with their projects and their lives each student grew to levels of leadership and competence that puzzle wood products colleagues from universities where support for utilization research has been far greater in terms of equipment, funds and proximity to the industrial arena. It must be conceded that Iowa State has developed more top quality wood products researchers from the smallest amount of program support than any forestry school in the United States. The secret? The dedication of Dwight Bensend.

Early in the 1960's, when Dr. Bensend was approaching that apogee of professional energy that marks the onset of the fruitful fifties (or frightful fifties if one has not laid down a good foundation), the opportunity to go with FAO and the University of Kentucky Mission to Indonesia stimulated the entire

Bensend family to take leave from Iowa State and go to Indonesia for almost two years. There is little doubt in my mind that this was another turning point in Dwight Bensend's life, for it was here that exposure to a desperately impoverished population showed him the vast opportunity that exists for helping those who are truly underprivileged by circumstance.

A tour of duty in a foreign land is always stimulating professionally in about the same measure as return to a home base, where life has gone on without one, is depressing. From these two opposed stimuli came a part of the Bensend career that reached a new peak of humane concern. He sent back two Indonesian young men to study at Iowa State. He became the counselor for all of the Indonesians that ultimately came to Iowa State. He combined his activities in the Collegiate Presbyterian Church, where he is an Elder, with that of his profession to support first Indonesian students and later other foreign students from Egypt, Korea, Taiwan and Turkey. When the efforts of the United States began to turn to the support of black students, it was this increasingly supportive man that we naturally assigned to work with Tuskegee Institute and through that connection to support seven black students who have come to our department to develop their careers. The professional who is also a

humanist in action must be a model for all who wring hands, beat breasts and forever ask, "But what can I do?"

This *Ames Forester* is dedicated to Dwight Bensend upon his retirement after he has put forty-five years of his life into Forestry and thirty-one of those into Iowa State. But in three years students may see his name and say, "Who was Dwight Bensend?" Neither this journal nor this dedication can prevent that. But that is *not* all there is:

- 1400 forestry graduates took courses under "Doc" Bensend.
- At least two dozen foresters with advanced degrees learned directly of his philosophy.
- Dozens of foreign students in and out of forestry have come to know America through his behavior.
- Seven and more black Americans have felt his helping hand.
- Thirty or so forestry teachers of all ages have worked closely with him at Iowa State and scores of professional foresters have had contact with him and have come to respect Iowa State because of him.

History, journals and dedicatory articles make poor monuments, but people, when changed by a good man's example, spread an influence that endures forever.



Dwight and Marguerite at the 1977 SAF convention in Albuquerque.